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Scandals in the Italian Beef Livestock Industry 2003

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Report Highlights: Current BSE testing does not ensure a safe meat supply according to Italy's Carabinieri. Although one million mad cow tests have been conducted on Italian cattle destined for slaughter since testing became compulsory at the beginning of 2001, the 88 detections are not as significant as actions to avoid BSE testing altogether. Repubblica's article on December 6th details illegal drug use on animals, fraud, cattle rustling, unregulated slaughter, and other misdeeds in Italy's beef and feed industry

Includes PSD changes: No
Includes Trade Matrix: No
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Over the two years since obligatory BSE testing was invoked, the GOI has been investigating irregularities in the cattle industry and meat trade. According to the report, investigations conducted by the Italian law enforcement unit responsible for fraud in food and animal health, the Carabinieri NAS, has documented extensive illegal hormone and drug use, cattle theft, and illegal slaughter. The article details abuses, arrests, fines, and the wily ways employed by some Italian producers to avoid BSE testing. The article also highlights some human health consequences of eating meat containing anabolic steroids, antibiotics, cortisone, and somatotrophin. Note: No mention is made of the regulated use of hormones on cattle in the US, scientific studies on this practice, nor any history of the WTO's conclusion that the EU ban on US hormone-treated beef is illegal. Notwithstanding implications that illegal practices in the beef sector endanger the public health, no mention is made of the GOI Ministry of Health's mandate to ensure a safe food supply. End Comment.

The article summarized Carabinieri investigations carried out from January 2001 to November 2002 in all of Italy. The following summarizes the news article:

- The problem is geographically widespread. Although Sicily is the Italian region with the largest number of violations, Lombardy (in the north, and the most wealthy of Italy's 20 regions) ranks in second place.
- 13,746 violations were found from a total of 26,707 inspections.
- 7,440 persons were found to be in violation of meat safety or animal health regulations.
- (Only) 60 persons were arrested.
- 363 plants and 1431 tons of meat were seized, totaling 114 million Euros in illegally drugged or contaminated meat.
- 424,549 head of cattle have been seized.

- 4034 inspections have been made in feed plants with 897 violations found in the feed sector.

Hormones (steroids) used to boost animal weight, cortisone for tissues to retain water, Beta-agonists to promote muscle growth, somatotrophin to increase milk production, and antibiotic prophylaxis to keep animals from falling ill were all found by the Carabinieri's inquiries into cattle and beef production. False certificates misrepresenting an older animal at a younger age in order to avoid compulsory BSE tests after slaughter were another typical violation. An animal id system based on ear tags was also found to be fraudulently used by many farmers who would state that their animal's tag was lost, apply for a new ear tag, and then use the duplicate tag on an illegally obtained animal.

According to Confagricoltura, one of the three Italian Farmer Organizations, since the BSE scandal occurred in 2000 cattle theft has increased 20 percent in Italy. Coronel Dainese, chief of NAS, stated that about 5 percent of Italian beef is illegally produced or marketed and BSE is no longer the major risk for Italian consumers of beef.

Comment: Italy's beef sector has been notorious for these types of practices. While the article depicts abuses in the beef livestock sector, this stands in sharp contrast to the pork sector. A significant difference is that the Italian beef sector has no exports to the US. Apart from the EU ban on imports of US hormone-treated beef, USDA has no trade concerns with Italian beef. Regarding Italian pork meat and processed hams, which do enter the US food supply, USDA has participated with the GOI to improve operations and inspections of pork slaughter and processing facilities. Technical collaboration with the GOI's Ministry of Health and veterinary officials has been positive and productive. End comment.